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MR. SIDNEY LEE
AND
THE BACONIANS

A Critic Criticised

By
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PREFATORY NOTE.

A "REAL CONVERSATION" between Mr. Sidney Lee and Mr. William Archer appeared in the *Pall Mall Magazine* of November, 1903. To this article I contributed a reply, to which I still await an answer from Mr. Lee. As he declines to offer any refutation of my criticism of his *Life of Shakespeare*, I have no hesitation, after some delay, in allowing Messrs. Gay & Bird, by the courtesy of the Editor of the *Pall Mall Magazine*, to issue a revised version of my letter.

GEORGE STRONACH.

7, Warrender Park Crescent, Edinburgh, May, 1904.

MR. SIDNEY LEE and THE BACONIANS.

A CRITIC CRITICISED.

[*Mr. Sidney Lee's denunciations of the Baconians have been unmeasured, and as this method of controversy is clearly open to retort, we have no hesitation in publishing the following letter although not holding ourselves responsible either for its arguments or its deductions.*—ED. *P.M.M.*]

ACCORDING to Mr. Sidney Lee, all who believe in the Baconian theory are "cranks." Some time ago he described them as "monomaniacs" whose "madhouse chatter threatens to develop into an epidemic disease." In fact, "the whole farrago of printed verbiage which fosters the Baconian bacillus is unworthy of serious attention from any but professed students of intellectual aberration." "The Baconian theory," according to Mr. Lee, "has no rational right to a hearing." And so on. Mr. Gladstone, as big a man as Mr. Lee, once wrote:—"I have always regarded the discussion as one perfectly serious, and *to be respected.*"

Argument, and not invective, is what the Baconians ask, but as no argument can be drawn from Mr. Lee the inquirer's only recourse is to consult his *Life of William Shakespeare.* According to the

reviewers, "this masterly work is an honour to English scholarship, an almost perfect model of its kind, and it is matter for great national rejoicing that the standard life of Shakespeare has at last been 'made in England.' Rarely have we seen a book so wholly satisfying, so admirably planned, so skilfully executed. . . . It is an absolutely indispensable handbook for every intelligent reader of the plays." [*Blackwood's Magazine*, February, 1899.]

In his preface Mr. Lee states that "Shakespearean literature, so far as it is known to me, still lacks a book that shall [? will] supply within a brief compass an exhaustive and well-arranged statement of the facts of Shakespeare's career, achievement and reputation; that shall [? will] reduce conjecture to the smallest dimensions consistent with coherence, and shall [? will] give verifiable references to all the original sources of information." Mr. Lee is quite correct—such a book is badly wanted; but he does not supply that want. Halliwell-Phillipps was born and lived many years before Mr. Lee made his literary *début*, yet his *Outlines* contain more reliable information than Mr. Lee's "complete and trustworthy guide-book."

The best *Life* of Shakespeare ever written was that by George Steevens, the great Shakespearean commentator. It consists of the following sentence: "All that is known with any degree of certainty concerning Shakespeare is, that he was born at Stratford-on-Avon, married and had children there—went to London, where he commenced actor, and wrote poems and plays—returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried."

This is genuine biography—but of what sort is Mr. Lee's? He promised, remember, to "reduce conjecture to the smallest dimensions." I give an idea of the "dimensions" of *his* 'conjecture":—

(1) "There is every *probability* that his ancestors."

(2) "*Probably* his birthplace."

(3) "Some doubt is justifiable as to the ordinarily accepted scene of his birth."

(4) "His summons to act at Court was *possibly* due."

(5) "One of them *doubtless* the alleged birthplace."

(6) "There is no inherent *improbability* in the tale."

(7) "William *probably* entered the school."

(8) "There seems good ground for regarding."

(9) "*Probably* in 1577 he was enlisted by his father."

(10) "*It is possible* that John's ill-luck."

(11) "Shakespeare's friends *may* have called the attention of the strolling players to the homeless lad."

(12) "The wedding *probably* took place."

(13) "The circumstances made it highly *improbable.*"

(14) "Renders it *improbable.*"

(15) "If, as is *possible,* it be by Shakespeare."

(16) "It seems *possible.*"

(17) "*Probably* his ignorance of affairs."

(18) "From such incidents *doubtless* sprang."

(19) "He was *doubtless* another."

(20) "His intellectual capacity and the amiability . . . were *probably* soon recognised."

(21) "It is hardly *possible* to doubt."

(22) "But there seems no doubt."

(23) "All the evidence points to the conclusion."

(24) "But in all *probability* he drew."

(25) "Justice Shallow is beyond doubt a reminiscence" [of Sir Thomas Lucy. According to Mrs. Stopes, he certainly is not].

(26) "The Rose was *doubtless* the earliest scene."

(27) "It was *doubtless* performing."

(28) "He *doubtless* owed all [his realistic portrayal of Italian life and sentiment] to the verbal reports of travelled friends, or to books."

(29) "Shakespeare *may be credited* with. . . "

(30) "The whole of Shakespeare's dramatic work was *probably* begun."

(31) "It was, *doubtless,* to Shakespeare's personal relations. . . ."

(32) "Shakespeare *doubtless* gained. . ."

(33) "It is *just possible.*"

(34) "The tirade was *probably* inspired."

(35) "The many references to travel in the *Sonnets* were, *doubtless*, reminiscences."

(36) "That Shakespeare visited any part of the Continent is even less *probable*." [That Bacon did is certain].

(37) "That Shakespeare joined any of these expeditions is highly *improbable*."

(38) "Renders it almost *impossible* that he could have gathered his knowledge of Northern Italy from personal observation."

(39) "There is no ground for assuming." } Within 8 lines.

(40) "There is every indication that." } Within 8 lines.

(41) "There is a likelihood that." } Within 8 lines.

(42) "There is little doubt that Shakespeare."

(43) "It was *probably* about 1571 that William."

(44) "It was *probably* in 1596 that Shakespeare."

(45) "But *in all probability* he drew."

(46) "*In all probability* it was."

(47) "It was *doubtless* under Shakespeare's guidance."

(48) "Shakespeare was *doubtless* withdrawn."

(49) "*Doubtless*, William . . ."

(50) "Shakespeare, *doubtless*, travelled."

Does Mr. Lee call this a *Life?* I have given 50 "guesses"—I could give 150—in this *Life of Shakespeare* boasting a reduction in "conjecture" that was never previously attempted. It is a mere tissue of conjecture and assumption. The whole story he relates is not that Shakespeare of Stratford was the author, but that the dramas were allowed without challenge—and without any claim on the part of the reputed author—to pass as his.

Mr. Lee alludes to his work as "a plain and practical narrative of the great dramatist's *personal history*," and says that he has "avoided merely æsthetic criticism." His volume is, however, mainly composed of "æsthetic criticism" of the plays, in the form of chapters on "Early Dramatic Work," "The Sonnets and their Literary History," "The Borrowed Conceits of the Sonnets," "The Supposed Story of Intrigue in the Sonnets," "The Development of Dramatic Power,"

"The Highest Themes of Tragedy," etc.—hundreds of pages directed to anything but the "personal history" of the reputed author of the plays. All that Mr. Lee has to give in the shape of "personal history" of the man of Stratford could be compressed into a few lines: viz.—(1) He was born 22nd or 23rd April, 1564 (p. 8). [*Probably*, although the birth was not registered.] (2) He was baptised 26th April (p. 8). [*Doubtlessly*, as the baptism is recorded.] (3) He seduced and was forced to marry Anne Hathaway, who had a child to him within six months after marriage* (p. 22). (4) He had to leave Stratford for poaching (p. 27). (5) He sued Philip Rogers for 2/- lent, among other debts in the same account (p. 206).† (6) He cheated his fellow-townsmen over the enclosure of public land (p. 270). (7) He endeavoured to obtain by means of false statements a coat-of-arms (p 188). (8) He "barred his wife's dower," and cut her off with his "second-best bed" (pp. 273-4.)‡

* "With Shakespeare marriage is a divine institution; with Bacon it is a business matter. Shakespeare married young and for love."—*Rolfe.* [Even the marriage is doubtful, as "no record of the solemnisation of Shakespeare's marriage survives" (p. 191), although Mrs. Stopes maintains:—"But they were married *somehow*, and William *probably* brought home his fatherless bride to his father's house."] Bacon's marriage was, at any rate, respectable, and as to the "business" part of it, his wife brought him £220 per annum, to which Bacon added £500 a year, which is more than the "love-mated" but wife-deserting and money-grabbing Shakspere did. [See (8) and (9) *infra.*] "*Bacon's* fall taught the usual lesson that intellectual genius, however commanding, never justified breaches of any moral law."—*S. Lee*, Oct. 4th, 1903. [Shakspere's "intellectual genius" *probably* does, at least Mr. Lee suggests its possibility.]

† "A sharp man of business this poet of ours. . . . He is by no means the ideal artist of the vulgar."—*Fleay.* "Neither a borrower nor a lender be."—*Hamlet.*

‡ "The eccentric bequest to his wife of his second-best bed *must have been* explicable by some circumstance unknown to us.

If such publication "was injurious to the receipts of the theatre," why did not the theatrical owners of *Hamlet* take steps to prevent rather than aid it? Then again Mr. Lee says:—"In the absence of any law of copyright, publishers defied the wishes of the owner of manuscripts" (p. 48), while on page 207 we read that *As You Like It* was entered on the Stationers' Registers for publication, and that "a prohibition was set on the publication" of that play and *Every Man in his Humour* by the Lord Chamberlain's men in 1600, and on page 245 that *Antony and Cleopatra* was also entered and licensed, but that "*the company hindered the publication,*" and neither play appeared in print till the First Folio was issued! If there was no copyright or no remedy at common law, how were these stoppages possible? "Mr. Lee's ideas of the contemporary copyright laws are as unsound as his notions of ecclesiastical law affecting marriage. There was no difficulty in the law. The common law protected literary work just as did the copyright act, which was merely declaratory of it" (Yeatman). "There is plenty of evidence," says Greg, "to show that the author or proprietor of a literary work could, in some cases at least, prevent unauthorised publication." How does Mr. Lee explain Shakspere's failure to take advantage of this right?

On page 264 Mr. Lee says:—"But until 1614 he (Shakspere) paid frequent visits to London, where friends in sympathy with his work were alone to be found," and on page 258, "There seems little doubt that he left with the manager of his company unfinished drafts of more than one play." In support of these statements there is not a particle of evidence. The only plays possible after 1611 were *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Henry VIII.*, in which even Mr. Lee can trace only a few scenes that might have been Shakespeare's. And these he magnifies into "drafts," describing two plays as "more than one play."

Mr. Lee in his "plain and practical" *Life* fails to give a copy of Shakspere's will. Has he read it? He tells us that the testator devised the tenement in Chapel Lane—which is never mentioned in the will—to his daughter Judith, and all the lands except this tenement to his other daughter, whereas he left no tenement to Judith. What he did was to leave £50 to Judith on condition that she abandoned to her sister Susanna her right to a "tenemente" in "the mannour of Rowington." Then Mr. Lee asserts that he left the Henley Street house to his sister Joan. He did nothing of the kind. He left the two Henley Street houses to Susanna; and all he left Joan was a "tenemente," place not mentioned, for her life only at 12d. rent.

Mr. Lee makes the following bold statement: "When attesting documents he [Shakspere's father] occasionally made his mark, but there is *evidence in the Stratford archives* that he could write with facility." This can be flatly contradicted, as there is no such evidence. Halliwell-Phillipps, who went minutely through the Stratford records, and who, after Malone, according to Mr. Lee, "has made the most important additions to our knowledge of Shakespeare's biography," says:—"There is no reasonable pretence for assuming that, in the time of John Shakespeare, whatever may have been the case at earlier periods, it was the practice for marks to be used by those who were capable of signing their names. No instance of the kind has been discovered amongst the numerous records of his era that are preserved at Stratford-on-Avon, while even a few rare examples in other districts, if such are to be found, would be insufficient to countenance a theory that he was able to write. All the known evidences point in the opposite direction, and it should be observed that, in common with many other of his illiterate contemporaries, he did not always adhere to the same kind of

symbol." Where, therefore, I would ask Mr. Lee, in "the Stratford archives" did he come upon "evidence that John Shakespeare could write with facility"? In his article on Shakespeare in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Mr. Lee himself says:—"But however well she [Shakspere's mother] was provided for, she was only able, *like her husband*, to make her mark in lieu of signing her name." In the same article we read:—"When attesting documents he made his mark, and there is no evidence that he could write." According, therefore, to Mr. Lee, with regard to the elder Shakspere (1) "There is evidence that he could write with facility," and (2) "There is no evidence that he could write."

Bacon is never mentioned in the body of the work; but Mr. Lee dismisses the Baconian theory in a contemptible and equally contemptuous "Appendix." In regard to the "Parallelisms," Mr. Lee declares that "most of them that are commonly quoted are phrases in ordinary use by all writers of the day"—a statement far removed from the truth. I can give him dozens of (1) Identical Expressions, (2) Identical Metaphors, (3) Identical Opinions, (4) Identical Quotations, (5) Identical Studies, (6) Identical *Errors*, (7) Identical use of unusual words, (8) Identities of Character, and (9) Indentities of Style, that were *not* "in ordinary use by all writers of the day," or by any one writer. "One parallelism has no significance; five attract attention; ten suggest inquiry; twenty raise a presumption; fifty establish a probability; a hundred dissolve every doubt"; but a thousand will not affect Mr. Lee's pre-conceived idea a single jot, although Oliver Wendell Holmes declared: "The wonderful parallelisms [in Shakespeare and Bacon] *must and will be* wrought out and followed out to such fair conclusions as they shall be found to force honest minds to adopt. . . .

Our Shakespeare scholars hereabouts are very impatient whenever the question of the authorship of the Plays and Poems is even alluded to. It *must* be spoken of, whether they like it or not."

But, according to Mr. Lee, this is all pure nonsense. "Why," he asks, "should the Baconian theorists have any following outside lunatic asylums? . . . Those who adopt the Baconian theory in any of its phases should be classed with the believers in the Cock Lane ghost, or in Arthur Orton's identity with Roger Tichborne. *Ignorance, vanity,* inability to test evidence, lack of scholarly habits of mind, are in each of these instances found to be the main causes predisposing half-educated members of the public [like Palmerston, Bright, Holmes, Bismarck] to the acceptance of the delusion; and when any of the genuinely deluded victims have been narrowly examined, they have invariably exhibited a tendency to monomania."* I have no doubt the names, dates, medical authorities, and other particulars of these examinations, can be supplied by Mr. Lee. The Baconians are not quite so cock-sure, however, of anything as Mr. Lee is of everything. All they ask is that the Shakspereans will study the whole question, freeing themselves from pre-conceived ideas, and then meet the arguments *seriatim.* This is just what Mr. Sidney Lee will not or cannot do. *Magna est veritas,* and it is truth

* *Cf.* Mr. Churton Collins :—"In all seriousness, this Baconian craze is a subject in which the student of morbid psychology is far more intimately concerned than *the* literary critic [*e.g.*, Mr. Collins]. *Ignorance and vanity* can account for much; the Idols of the Cave and of the Market-place for more, but none of these, singly or collectively, can account for all . . . and so this ridiculous epidemic ["Epidemic disease."—*Lee*] spreads till it has now assumed the proportions, and many characteristics, of the dancing mania of the Middle Ages." Wonderful agreement —if not argument—in two great minds!

only that the Baconians seek. Other men of "habits of mind" as scholarly as Mr. Lee's have been engaged in the Shakespeare "mystery" all their lives, and have found difficulties in reconciling the life of the actor with the works of the dramatist; but Mr. Lee extricates himself from all his difficulties with the aid of "possibly," "probably," "doubtless," and other qualifying adverbs. Guesses and fictions he substitutes for what he calls "facts." One of his most extraordinary "facts" is that Mr. Donnelly "pretended to have discovered among Bacon's papers a numerical cypher which enabled him to pick out letters appearing at certain intervals in the pages of Shakespeare's First Folio, and the selected letters formed words and sentences categorically stating that Bacon was author of the plays." This precious criticism contains only *three* mis-statements! Mr. Lee can never have seen *The Great Cryptogram*, and I challenge him to prove his *dicta* in the passage I have quoted.

I am afraid my letter is already too long; but there are other details in this authoritative "personal history" that I would like to inquire about from its author. Mr. Lee says, "Shakespeare had no title to rank as a classical scholar, and he did not disdain a liberal use of translations." Mr. Churton Collins has shown in his recently published *Studies in Shakespeare* that "so far from Shakespeare having no pretension to classical scholarship . . . of the Greek classics in the Latin versions he had a remarkably extensive knowledge," and that he borrowed right and left from Sophocles and Euripides, of whose plays there were no English translations at the time; while in the *Nineteenth Century* the Rev. R. S. Laffan has shown that the author of the plays was intimately acquainted with Æschylus. Yet Mr. Collins abuses Baconians for believing that "the man of Stratford" did not

possess that knowledge. That the author of the plays knew Latin, French and Italian is proved by the fact that the plots and characters of several of his plays are drawn from works in these languages of which also no English translations were then available. But *possibly* Mr. Lee agrees with the Shakespearean critic Dennis, who wrote, "He who allows Shakespeare had learning, and a learning with the ancients, ought to be looked upon as a detractor from the glory of Great Britain." I am silly enough to believe that "the heights of classic knowledge climbed by Shakespeare were not scaled by any grammar-school prodigy of the sixteenth or any other century in England." (Theobald).

Then Mr. Lee explains the marvellous and accurate law knowledge of Shakspere in the plays by "the many legal processes in which his father was involved, and in part to early intercourse with members of the Inns of Court" [Bacon, *probably*, among the number]. Let him study the law in Sonnets XLVI. and LXXXVII., and he will, *possibly*, change his mind. Of the former Lord Campbell said, "Without a considerable knowledge of English forensic procedure, it cannot be fully understood." A certain Mr. Fiske once wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* that Shakspere could easily have got all his knowledge of law "from an evening chat with some legal friend at an ale-house." This is quite as *probable* as Mr. Lee's suggestion.

On page 33 of the *Life* in which "conjecture" is almost entirely abjured (according to its author), the following passage occurs:—"Shakespeare's friends [at Stratford] *may have* called the attention of the strolling players [on a visit to Stratford] to the homeless lad, rumours of whose search for employment about the London theatres had *doubtless* reached Stratford. From such incidents *seems* to have sprung the opportunity

which offered Shakespeare fame and fortune.* His intellectual capacity, and the amiability with which he turned to account his versatile powers [up to that time, be it noted, all that is related of Shakspere was that he had been a poacher and a butcher's apprentice] were *probably* soon recognised, and *thenceforth his promotion was assured.*" This is quite affecting—this lively non-conjectural Barnardo-like interest Shakspere's friends in Stratford *must* have taken in the "homeless lad," who, according to Sir Theodore Martin and Mrs. Stopes, fled from Stratford after his deer-stealing exploits with the manuscript of *Venus and Adonis* "in his pocket."† Can Shaksperean "faith" such as this find its parallel in any item of the Baconian creed? Then a few years afterwards "the homeless lad" produces his first play, *Love's Labour's Lost,* "so learned, so academic, so scholastic in expression and allusion, that it is unfit for popular representation."

Next we have the following *personal history:* "It was *probably* in 1596 that Shakespeare returned to his native town . . . thenceforth the poet's relations with Stratford were uninterrupted. . . . Until the close of his professional career he paid the town *at least an annual visit.*" There is no evidence whatever to show that Shakspere ever visited Stratford from the time he left it (date unknown) to the time he returned to it (date unknown). It is not even known that he was at the

Cf. Mrs. Stopes' statement:—"Eventually he went to London, *probably* with introductions to many people supposed to be able and willing to help him. There were both Ardens and Shakespeares in London and many Warwickshire men, and they thought that some place might be found even for him, the landless, unapprenticed, untrained son of a straitened father." How pathetic!

†Mr. Churton Collins and others give the date of the composition of *Venus and Adonis* as 1585, *before* Shakspere left Stratford.

funeral of his father or mother or of his son Hamnet or at the marriage of his daughter Susanna!

Mr. Lee says: "The poet's mother was buried in the parish church." Nobody knows where Shakspere's father or mother or son lies buried, as he forgot to mark their graves—wealthy man though he was. He made provision, however, for his own slab, for which he left the famous "curse," debarring (as he had "barred her dower") his wife from the grave in which he was buried only seventeen feet deep, although, as Mr. Lee says (p. 273), the widow "expressed a desire to be buried beside her husband." Shakspere's marriage must, after all, have been one of "love," as his admirer Rolfe maintains! [See Note, p. 9.]

How conveniently Mr. Lee twists out of his difficulties with regard to Shakespeare's universal *knowledge* of the life of a soldier, the life of a courtier, the life of a sailor,—the life of everybody! It was all accomplished by his "intuitive power of realising life under almost every aspect *by force of his imagination.*" There is no proof that Shakspere climbed the tree of knowledge. According to Mr. Lee, there was no necessity for such a feat. He stood below the tree with his mouth open, and the fruit dropped into it *intuitively*. Lucky Shakspere! Yet Dr. Johnson declared—"Shakespeare, however favoured by nature, could impart only what he had learned." Mr. Lee knows differently, however.

Friends, we have seen, supplied Shakspere with his knowledge of law, so we are not surprised to learn from Mr. Lee that "he *doubtless* obtained all his knowledge of Northern Italy from the verbal reports of travelled friends or from books, the contents of which he had a rare power of assimilating and vitalising." The names of the books are not mentioned, but *probably* they were early editions of Baedeker or Murray, none of which are extant in any public or private library.

We are informed that "Shakespeare's accurate reference in *Macbeth* to the 'nimble' and 'sweet climate' of Inverness, and the vivid impression he conveys of the aspects of wild Highland heaths . . . can be *satisfactorily* accounted for by his *inevitable* intercourse with Scotsmen in London and the theatres." Obliging Scotsmen! I wonder how many London (or Scotch) Scotsmen of the period had ever been so far north as Inverness in the days of Queen Bess.

"It was *doubtless*," also, we learn, "to Shakespeare's relations with men and women of the Court that his Sonnets owed their existence," and *probably* where he obtained his marvellous knowledge of Court ceremonial. The actor and playwright hobnobbed *probably* with the nobility at the Court of Elizabeth and James, flirted with the Queen (*incog.*) on the stage of the "Globe," and the King wrote him a letter, with which *probably* he lit his pipe, as it has never since been forthcoming. *Probably*, it was also through these "personal relations" that we are to account for the author of the plays being a thorough aristocrat—"a Tory and a gentleman," as Hartley Coleridge calls him,—although he was hounded from Stratford for stealing an aristocrat's deer. The masses he detested—"tag-rag people," "disordered rabble," "beastly plebeians," etc., he calls them—not a good word for, or a scrap of sympathy with, the "toiling masses" is to be found in Shakespeare, but then Shakspere held aristocrats' horses at the stage door, and associated with Raleigh at the "Mermaid." I am under the impression that Bacon was an aristocrat, and a *persona grata* at Court; but then Mr. Lee tells us that Bacon could have had nothing to do with the plays, and that is, of course, conclusive.

Then, *probably*, Shakspere obtained his medical knowledge—including the anticipation of Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood—from his son-in-

law, "Dr." Hall, who believed in the curative properties of "frog-spawn water, juice of goose-excrements, powdered human skulls, and restoratives made from snails, earth-worms, and swallows' nests!"

In conclusion, may I ask Mr. Lee how he accounts for the fact that two such diverse men in Elizabethan literature used the same expressions, aired the same ideas, the one the counterpart in prose of the other in verse—"the one an aristocrat, the other a plebeian; the one the first subject of the realm, the other an actor; the one highly educated, the other uneducated; the one the son of scholarly parents, the other the son of illiterates, who could not write their names"? The positions and circumstances of Shakspere and Bacon were as wide apart as the poles, and yet their thoughts, their expressions, their mistakes are identical. "There is an understanding," says Carlyle, "manifested in the construction of Shakespeare's plays equal to that in Bacon's *Novum Organum*." "The wisdom displayed in Shakespeare," says Hazlitt, "was equal in profoundness to the great Lord Bacon's *Novum Organum*." Well might Lowell speak of "the apparition known to moderns as Shakespeare;" and Coleridge write: "What! are we to have miracles in sport? . . . Does God choose idiots by whom to convey divine truth to man?" According to Mr. Lee, the answer is in the affirmative, and he quotes with approval Pope's contemptible couplet:

> *"For gain not glory winged his roving flight,*
> *And grew immortal in his own despite."*

Before I finish, I would ask Mr. Sidney Lee's authority for the following *personal history:* "Shakespeare, it it should also be remembered, *must have been* a regular attendant at the parish church, and *may at times have*

enjoyed a sermon." * Is this free from "conjecture?" It is not unlike the statement of Judge Willis: "Shakespeare was, *I am inclined to think*, present frequently at St. Clement Danes Church." Only a change of *venue!* And what scrap of authority has Mr. Lee for maintaining—"The copy for the press, the manuscripts of the plays, the publishers obtained from the managers of the acting company with whom Shakespeare was long connected as both author and actor"? If Mr. Lee's authorities for this detail are Heminge and Condell, he should turn to the best edition of Shakespeare's plays ever produced—the Cambridge edition—when he will find that the statements of the professed editors of the First Folio, which recently Mr. Lee has taken under his wing, are by their own confession entirely contradictory and untrustworthy. "In short, the authority of the Folio is uniformly rejected, . . . the assertions of its editors [are] discredited," by the editor, Mr. Aldis Wright.

I am sorry I am precluded by the length of this letter to take up other points, *e.g.*, Mr. Lee's account of the First Folio, but this has been very ably done by Mr. Walter W. Greg, who calls attention to Mr. Lee's numerous bibliographical errors in an article in *The Library*, July, 1903, where it is stated: "In these cases even the expert is apt to be misled by Mr. Lee's cheerful confidence of assertion. He is equally dangerous when committing himself unreservedly to statements which require quali-

* *Stratford-on-Avon* (1885), p. 72. This revelation is worth contrasting with the statement (*Life*, p. 177):—"The creator of Falstaff could have been no stranger to tavern life, and he *doubtless* took part with zest in the convivialities of men of letters." Shakspere seems to have been equally at home in "church" or "tavern," not forgetting court and palace. But if Shakspere attended church, it is more than his father did, as Mr. Lee tells us (p. 186) he was "'presented' as a recusant for *absenting himself from church*." Not much encouragement this for young William!

fication or explanation." And of other Lee "facts" Mr. Greg maintains: "Here I am afraid Mr. Lee has been drawing upon his imagination; it is at best pretty fiction." And Mr. Greg proves his case, with regard to Mr. Lee's statements regarding the First Folio.

I find also that Mr. Lee has no better acquaintance with the Quartos. On page 299 he says:—"At the time of his death in 1616 there had been printed *in quarto* seven editions of his 'Venus and Adonis,' and five editions of his 'Lucrece.'" Mr. Lee ought to have known that only the first two editions of "Venus and Adonis," and only the first edition of "Lucrece" were "printed in quarto."

Mr. Lee has abused Baconians, but he has never argued with them. Mr. Edwin Reed challenged him to a public debate in America, but he would not take it up. I have not a tithe of the knowledge and ability of Mr. Reed, but I am willing to thrash out the subject with Mr. Lee when and where he pleases. I may not support the claim of Bacon, but I shall certainly take Mr. Lee's *Life of Shakespeare* in my hand, and ask him where he obtained the "facts" for his "personal history." Till he does this, Baconians may be excused for maintaining that Mr. Lee has unconsciously invented "a fictitious biography" to sustain a fictitious character, a biography "full of fanciful might-have-beens," without which, according to Mr. F. G. Fleay, a *Life of Shakespeare* cannot apparently be compiled.

It must have been the author of this "standard" *Life of Shakespeare* whom Mr. Asquith had in his eye when he said:—"Few things are more interesting to watch than the attempts of scholars and critics to reconstruct the life of a man at once so illustrious and so obscure as the greatest of our poets," and that the work of a Shakespeare biographer is "not so much an essay in biography as in the more or less scientific use

of the biographic imagination." The "less" applies admirably to Mr. Sidney Lee's so-called *Life of William Shakespeare.*

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